



POLICE TRAFFIC SERVICES IN THE 21ST CENTURY SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS PUBLISHED

Traffic enforcement has been a mainstay of the law enforcement profession for a long time. Almost as soon as there were cars, a mechanized police service began enforcing traffic laws. Recently, increasing community demands on law enforcement agencies, rising crime rates, and shifting priorities have begun to direct resources away from traffic enforcement. That trend is risky. One of the most effective tools in a law enforcement agency's repertoire is the alert patrol officer. Consider that the Oklahoma City bombing was solved as a direct result of a routine traffic stop, or, that one of the largest marijuana seizures ever in Los Angeles resulted from a routine traffic stop for expired tags, or, that the *cop in the rear view mirror* is a good deterrent for aggressive drivers and speeders.

More people are killed each year in traffic crashes than are murdered -- a fatality occurs every 13 minutes while a murder occurs every 21 minutes. "Americans seem to accept 40,000 traffic deaths a year as inevitable but are outraged that we cannot prevent the fewer than 20,000 homicides yearly. Is dying in a motor vehicle "less dead" than being murdered, or do we have a perception problem?" (Captain Bob Collins, Independence, Missouri Police Department, seminar participant)

The Police Executive Research Forum organized a national seminar to discuss factors that would affect police traffic services as it enters the 21st century for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The seminar was held in September 1996 in Reno, Nevada with 31 traffic safety experts and law enforcement administrators from various types and sizes of state and local law enforcement agencies. The proceedings of the three day conference are available.

Seminar participants took on the ambitious task of setting a direction for police traffic services in the next century. That required developing a mission, setting objectives, and recommending strategies.

Vision

Police traffic services in the 21st century will maintain and improve its status as an essential element of the policing function in order to contribute to the overall quality of life in our communities.

Mission

The mission of police traffic services in the United States is to reduce the number and severity of traffic crashes, deter and detect crime, and increase the efficient use of roadways.

Issues

The participants identified six main issues they thought would affect the delivery of police traffic services and offered recommendations for each one.

- ▶ Continued demand for the further diversion of law enforcement personnel from traffic services to crime fighting activities.
- ▶ Less federal funding for crime and traffic safety programs, a greatly reduced federal role in those areas, and an increased drain on state and local resources.
- ▶ Increasing availability of new law enforcement technology such as in-vehicle videos, mobile data terminals, notebook and clipboard computer systems.
- ▶ Static levels of personnel with static or reduced budgets



- ▶ Potential increases in fatalities and injuries, although fatality rates per vehicle mile traveled remains constant or decreases.
- ▶ Continued increases in the numbers of licensed drivers and registered vehicles.

Goals

By the end of the seminar, participants had highlighted four major goals for law enforcement to advance in the course of delivering improved traffic services. For each major goal, several objectives were identified as essential for success. They are summarized here.

1. To improve quality of life issues through police traffic services, through

- crash reduction
- criminal interdiction as a by product of efficient traffic enforcement

2. To improve the public and official perception of the advantages of police traffic services in crime control, crash and injury management, through

- public outreach
- proactive approach to enforcement
- traffic related performance measures for enforcement personnel
- partnership development
- improvement of public perception
- better use of local data to measure quality of life issues and link them to crash and injury management issues.

3. To use state of the art management and training techniques, technology, research, innovation, information, and evaluation to enhance the quality of police traffic services, through

- increasing management and leadership training for law enforcement executives and mid level managers
- improving law enforcement's traffic safety relationship with the media
- sharing information
- exploring and securing alternative funding sources

4. To be proactive in identifying and adjusting to traffic safety issues and their relationship to other policing issues, through

- data management
- community involvement
- interagency cooperation and information sharing
- internal and external education and training

The report contains position papers written by each participant before the seminar began, describing what each thought about the issues facing law enforcement as the new century approaches, and opening comments.

HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of *Police Traffic Services in the 21st Century* (156 pages), write to the Media and Marketing Division, NHTSA, NTS-21, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to (202) 493-2062.

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